

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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CONSERVATION PROGRAM RECOMMENDED TO RESOLVE FURBISH LOUSEWORT/DICKEY-LINCOLN CONFLICT

The Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today issuance of its biological opinion concerning the Furbish lousewort, an endangered plant, and the Army Corps of Engineer's proposed Dickey-Lincoln School Lakes project in Maine.

The opinion contains recommendations for a conservation program which if followed by the Corps should allow the construction of the proposed project while not placing the species in jeopardy.

The opinion, required by the Endangered Species Act, was delivered to the Corps June 27 and comes after almost 1½ years of studies and cooperation between the two agencies.

"This was one of the most complex consultations yet," said Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Interior Department agency, "but it was much less difficult than it could have been because of the cooperative attitude of the Corps. Shortly after the species was rediscovered in 1976 and appeared likely to be listed as an endangered species, the Corps initiated an informal consultation process with us so we could look for alternative solutions to the potential problem.

"We commend the Corps for its continuing effort in conducting the necessary studies and field inventory work to obtain information essential to assessing the anticipated effects of the project on the lousewort. This data proved to be extremely useful to the consultation team by providing important information on which to base our biological opinion."

(over)

The Dickey-Lincoln Lakes project consists of two dams, the Dickey Dam and the Lincoln School Dam, located in northern Aroostook County, Maine. The project would provide electricity to help meet the anticipated power needs of New England. The proposed projects would inundate approximately 88,000 acres of land and 267 miles of streams including 55 miles of the St. John River.

The lousewort was listed as endangered because dumping, natural landslides, construction, and river bank modification associated with the project would have threatened its existence. As originally planned the Dickey-Lincoln project would destroy approximately 353 plants at 13 sites over 35 miles of the plant's range. Within the 70-mile zone downstream from the project, another 162 plants at five sites would be jeopardized by dumping of refuse over river banks, construction, and other bank modifications.

The conservation program recommended by the Fish and Wildlife Service includes: (1) establishment of new, self-sustaining colonies of the species through transplantation, seeding, or other appropriate techniques; (2) acquisition and protection of existing lousewort habitats below the project impoundment in addition to acquiring habitat capable of supporting new populations; (3) research which will lead to a better understanding of habitat needs and propagation techniques for the Furbish lousewort; (4) a monitoring program to detect changes in the lousewort's biological status; and (5) research on the effect of downstream flows on the lousewort and its habitat after construction of the project.

"This was also our first consultation involving plants," Greenwalt said. "It required us to consider the problems and possible solutions from a different perspective than is normal for consultations involving animals."

On June 15, a consultation team of Fish and Wildlife Service biologists met with representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers to discuss the months of studies, the various site surveys, and other data which had been compiled. It was analysis of this information which led to the biological opinion.

Service biologists believe that if the conservation program is followed, it will result in an increase in numbers of the species and increased protection for its habitat.